

**(Washington, DC)** Today, Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Miramar) introduced the *Honest and Open Testimony Act*, a bill that would help provide for an honest and open discussion regarding Don't Ask, Don't Tell by allowing active-duty members of the Armed Forces, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) members, to openly testify in Congressional hearings without fear of retribution.

The *Honest and Open Testimony Act* expands current whistleblower protections between members of the Armed Forces and Members of Congress to include communications from active-duty service members who testify concerning Don't Ask, Don't Tell in a Congressional hearing, as well as those who do so and disclose their sexual orientation.

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell hurts our troops, runs counter to the values of our Armed Forces, and threatens our national security. Since the law was implemented in 1994, over 13,500 qualified service members have been lost to Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and counting. Furthermore, Don't Ask, Don't Tell continues to undermine and demoralize the more than 65,000 GLBT Americans currently serving on active duty," said Hastings.

"As the United States continues to work toward responsibly ending the war in Iraq and reengages the threat from al Qaeda in Afghanistan, our GLBT service members offer invaluable skills that enhance our military's potency and readiness. They are linguists, aviators, medics, and highly-trained soldiers who are involved in valuable operations that have nothing to do with their sexual orientation and everything to do with protecting our freedom and advancing our national security interests.

"I am extremely proud of the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces and truly appreciate the countless sacrifices they continue to make every single day to protect this nation and the American people. They deserve better than Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and now is the time to take action," further noted Hastings.

"I realize that this issue is considered controversial, but it should not be. As Congress prepares to debate the future of Don't Ask, Don't Tell with hearings in the Senate and in the House of Representatives, we must ensure that we hear all sides of the issue and especially from active-duty GLBT service members. The *Honest and Open Testimony Act* would bring us one

step closer to repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell once and for all and replacing it with a policy of inclusion and non-discrimination."

***Original co-sponsors of the Honest and Open Testimony Act include: Representatives Jim Moran, Lois Capps, Shelley Berkley, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Fortney "Pete" Stark, Diane Watson, Donna Edwards, Raúl Grijalva, Alan Grayson, Judy Chu, Gregory Meeks, Elijah E. Cummings, John Hall, Gary Ackerman, Jackie Speier, Loretta Sanchez, Keith Ellison, John D. Dingell, Earl Blumenauer, Lynn Woolsey, Carolyn Kilpatrick, Yvette Clarke, Chellie Pingree, Mazie Hirono, Bob Filner, Neil Abercrombie, and Tim Walz.***

The Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Don't Ask, Don't Tell, which was originally expected to take place last November, has been postponed indefinitely until next year. In addition, a House Armed Services Committee hearing is also expected to be held sometime next year.

On June 22, 2009 and August 27, 2009, Congressman Hastings sent a letter to President Obama, supported by 76 fellow Members of Congress, urging him to take leadership and to work together with Congress to repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell. The White House has yet to respond. Furthermore, on July 28, 2009, Congressman Hastings offered, then withdrew, an amendment to the 2010 Department of Defense Appropriations bill that would have prohibited the use of funds to carry out the provisions in Don't Ask, Don't Tell regarding investigating and separating soldiers who admit that they are homosexual, bisexual, or transgender.

*Congressman Alcee L. Hastings is Vice Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, a senior member of the House Rules Committee, and Co-Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission.*

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